DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 269 828 CS 505 289

AUTHOR Adkins, Gale R.
TITLE Use of the Specialist Team in Instructional Television.
PUB DATE [81]
NOTE 14p.; Portions of this article were abstracted from an earlier article published in "Journal of Educational Television," v7 n2 1981.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Cooperation; *Cooperative Planning; Coordination; *Educational Television; Instructional Design; *Production Techniques; Program Design; *Programing (Broadcast); Specialists; Speech Communication; *Teamwork; *Technical Assistance

ABSTRACT

The specialist team approach to the design and preparation of instructional television materials uses a core group of professionals who work closely together, each making unique contributions throughout the duration of a project. Typically the team consists of content authorities, an instructional designer, a writer, a producer-director, and a researcher. The best known users of the team approach are the Children's Television Workshop, the British Open University, the Agency for Instructional Television, the University of Mid-America, and the National University Consortium. This "evolutionary" approach to the creation of program series is both traditional and practical in American public television stations. When a decision is made to implement a new series, personnel become involved one at a time or in task-oriented meetings of necessary personnel. Producer, writer, content specialists, director, researcher, and others are designated and consulted when the need for their services becomes evident. Unfortunately, this approach misses some of the most important advantages of the team concept. Lost are the early and continuing opportunities for specialized contributions and creative interaction and the minimized likelihood of a project being deprived of some particular expertise that would lead to a more effective program or more efficient procedures. Nevertheless, application of the specialist team concept tends to result in a more effective and productive use of the particular skills of key professionals whose expertise is needed on an instructional television project. (HOD)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

ED269828

# Use of the Specialist Team in Instructional Television*

By

Gale R. Adkins

Professor of Speech
Director of Radio-TV Research
Indiana State University

Terre Haute, Indiana
47809

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

*Portions of this article have been abstracted from an earlier article, written by this author and published in the Journal of Educational Television, VII:2, 1981 (Educational Television Association, United Kingdom).

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Gale R. Adkins

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."



CS505289

# Use of the Specialist Team in Instructional Television

By

Gale R. Adkins
Director of Radio-TV Research
Indiana State University

## Abstract

A specialist team approach to the design and preparation of instructional television materials refers to the early assignment of a core group of professionals who work closely together, each making unique contributions throughout the duration of a project. Typically the team consists of content authorities, instructional designer, writer, producer-director, and researcher. The best known users of the team approach are the Children's Television Workshop, the British Open University, the Agency for Instructional Television, the University of Mid-America, and the National University Consortium. Application of the specialist team concept tends to result in a more effective and productive use of the particular skills of key professionals whose expertise is needed on an ITV project.

The notion that effective materials for televised instruction are most likely to be produced through the coordinated efforts of a team of capable specialists is not completely new. A plan for a specialist team approach to the design and production of instructional television programs was published in the professional literature in 1960[1]. It is not unlikely that other educational broadcasters were having similar thoughts. However, in the early 1960's the idea of undertaking a new approach to instructional television program planning and production was a little ahead of its time. Attention in those years was focussed on the critical issues of federal funding for non-commercial stations, proposals for live networking, and the development of a new national structure for public broadcasting in America.

The first extensive and sustained applications of the specialist team idea appeared in the Children's Television Workshop in 1968[2, p. 163] and in the British Open University in 1970[3, p. 125]. Both of these innovative enterprises soon commanded world-wide respect and admiration for the educational effectiveness and over-all success of their television series. Their methods, formats and procedures were praised and imitated. Nevertheless, inquiry into the program planning and production procedures used in public television stations in the United States in 1981 indicated that a specialist team approach to the design and production of ITV programs is even now being employed in only a few public stations.

The most clear-cut application of the interdisciplinary team approach has been and still is in the British Open University. At the BOU a course team consists of the academic staff who have been chosen to work on a course, the BBC radio and TV producers assigned to the course, a member of the BOU's Institute of Educational Technology, and various editors and assistants [4, p. 7]. Educational technologists are prepared to advise on the design and evaluation of instructional materials and activities. Formative and summative research procedures are employed. It is, incidentally, in harmony with the specialist team concept that the number of persons on the team and the areas of expertise they represent should vary with the nature and magnitude of the project and the organizational context within which it operates. Richard

Hooper, formerly Senior Producer, BBC Open University Productions, says, "The Course Team....is, I believe, the OU's single most important contribution to the future of new media in education" [3, p. 181].

A BBC publication describes the responsibilities of the OU Course Team:

> This team has the job of designing, articulating, supervising and examining the whole course, from start to finish -- with the aid of consultants, administrators, external examiners, and the University's regional services, which provide the correspondence tuition and personal counselling which home based students need [4, p. 7].

It is important to recognize that a BOU course team is responsible for all the course components that make up the OU learning system -- including printed materials, television and radio presentations, tuition and counselling, assignments and assessments [4, p. 8]. At this time no organization in the United States has undertaken any such massive and complicated instructional multi-media project.

The most significant users of the specialist team approach in the United States are the Children's Television Workshop, a not-for-profit corporation engaged in educational television production, and a few large ITV production consortia. In each case the structure, constituency and objectives of the producing organization have resulted in a highly individualized but essentially team approach.

The Children's Television Workshop, producers of such precedent-breaking series as "Sesame Street" and "The Electric Company," is unique in its extensive and continuous use of formative research during program development. Following what has become known as

the CTW Operational Model, teamwork begins with the initial step of establishing behavioral goals for a series. Advisors representing relevant areas of content, education, research, professional television and writing first become involved at the goal setting stage and continue involvement during the development process. Research leads the way in determining competence of the target audience, analyzing appeal of existing materials, testing experimental production, progress testing, and summative evaluation [5, p. 307]. Dynamic team interaction between researchers and the creative staff of producers, directors and writers is the very essence of the project. In such matters as the selection of content and choice of teaching strategy formative research tends to be employed to provide answers which in other organizational circumstances might be supplied by persons relying only on personal experience and professional judgment.

Several factors, specifically the philosophy of CTW, the strength of the resident research staff, adequate funding levels, and realistic production schedules have made possible at CTW a team approach that is unusually oriented to formative research.

The Agency for Instructional Television is a non-profit organization with the dual purposes of operating an extensive library of recorded instructional TV materials and serving as an organizer of consortiums to produce major ITV series. The

complicated consortium development process pioneered by AIT involves the establishment of a new consortium of education agencies which help plan, supply financial support, promote, and utilize each new series.

A new AIT production project starts with needs determination which is achieved through AIT staff interaction with representatives of the education agencies. AIT then selects a planning team to conceptualize the project. In addition to members of the AIT staff, the planning team includes curriculum experts and one or more classroom teachers. A chief consultant is employed to work with the AIT project director in leading the planning and design teams and with the AIT director of evaluation in the design and implementation of research. AIT appoints a curriculum design team which develops the instructional design for both television and print components. Producers and writers meet with the design team to go over proposed program materials before preparing a scenario and eventually a finished script. Arrangements for actual production are made with agencies believed to be highly competent in the kind of production expected. A utilization design team and a community awareness design team begin their work of building upon the framework established by the curriculum team. Early programs in a series are tested with children in classrooms. Other formative research activities are carried out in various ways throughout the program development process. The consortium structure used by AIT leads logically to the assignment of functions to specialized teams which can

effectively apply certain competencies and at the same time represent constituent agencies. Coordination, continuity and such central services as formative evaluation are accomplished by key personnel from the AIT staff[6, pp. 32-57].

The University of Mid-America is a consortium of college-level institutions engaged in extending education to adult learners who do not avail themselves of formally scheduled classes on campus. Course materials reach enrollees through instructional packages mailed to their homes and through the broadcast and printed mass media. UMA has started developing their own complete courses through a team approach that is generally modeled after the British Open University. The UMA concept of the course team is described as follows:

> The course team is composed of persons filling four key roles: the content expert, the instructional developer, the television producer, and the formative evaluator. The assumption is that the production of a high quality, multimedia course for adult learners demands the expertise of professionals representing a number of discipline areas and that a group of qualified and committed people can develop a better multimedia course than can one individual [7, p.23].

The National University Consortium for Telecommunications in Teaching, organized by the University of Maryland, is using course development teams. Now in its second year of activity this consortium patterns its operations after the Open University of the United Kingdom. Courses yielding credits toward a Bachelor's degree are made available to homebased adult students through television and a directed study system. Adaptations of

print materials and television broadcasts from British Open University courses are being integrated into the curriculum. The NUC course development teams began their work early in 1981, employing structure and methodology similar to that of the BOU teams. Introductions and conclusions to the BOU television programs are being produced as well as complete telecourses and related materials[8, p. 9].

Public television stations in the United States do not ordinarity think of their program planning and production procedures as being accomplished through a team approach. Of course the combined efforts necessary to plan and prepare a television series tend naturally to become a kind of teamwork. Major producing stations like WGBH, WNET and WETA employ formative research when it is specially planned and funded as part of a major production project. Such researcher-writer-producer cooperation would be regarded as a version of the team approach, although the areas of specialized expertise represented may be somewhat limited and interaction among team members may not exist throughout the project.

It is both traditional and practical in American public TV stations to follow what might be called the "evolutionary" approach to the creation of program series. When a decision is made to do a new series, personnel becomes involved one at a time or in task-oriented meetings of persons obviously needed.

Producer, writer, content specialists, director, researcher and others are designated and consulted when the need for their services becomes evident.

Unfortunately the evolutionary, "call me if you need me," approach to series planning, program design and production misses some of the most important advantages of the team concept. Lost are the early and continuing opportunities for specialized contributions and creative interaction and the minimized likelihood of a project being deprived of some particular expertise that would lead to a more effective program or more efficient procedures.

The benefits most likely to be gained through the team approach are: (1) a more specific and dependable foundation of background information and educational objectives, (2) improved program design, which may come both from formative research and from the specialized knowledge and experience of team members, (3) greater assurance of appropriate coverage of content and consistent focus on designated educational goals, (4) more effective summative evaluation, and (5) important and unpredictable elements of synergistic creativity, rapport, and internal communication that result from the sustained contact and interaction of team members.

Looking only at the measure to which the specialist team approach is being used today, the extent of use is certainly not great. Few public TV stations have on their payrolls or

can afford to employ specialists such as instructional designers or formative researchers who are essential to the complete team concept.

Perhaps a less evident reason for practices that fall short of the team approach is the tendency to allow only minimum planning and production time for the preparation of a new ITV series. Behind this may be the fact that so many educational institutions and public TV stations still do not take ITV very seriously. There are distinguished exceptions, but in general ITV seldom enjoys top priorities. In universities and in the public schools ITV is seldom seen as a basic tool or resource. Most often it is treated as an expendable supplement. Many educators and public broadcasters do believe strongly in ITV, but the time, personnel and money required for specialist team operation and formative research can be obtained only when commitment is broad and top level.

Looking at the quality of results obtained by organizations that do use the specialist team approach, the view is much more encouraging. Principal users of the team approach in America are the large ITV production consortia and the Children's Television Workshop. These production agencies are a vital source of high quality ITV programming. A survey of the ITV series most scheduled by public TV stations in 1978-79 showed all but two of the top ten series were developed by consortia of various configurations [9]. The Children's

Television Workshop has developed researcher-producer teamwork to unique efficiency and in the "Sesame Street" tradition has achieved unparalleled acceptance and effectiveness for instructional TV in America. The Agency for Instructional Television has pioneered the consortium development process and structured activities from needs determination to promotion around specialist teams. Finally, the successful working prototype for the interdisciplinary team approach is the British Open University. Academics, educational technologists, and BBC producers constitute course teams which have prepared multi-media courses utilized in many countries and observed as models wherever there is serious use of educational broadcasting. There now appears to be strong evidence that the team approach, with interaction among content authorities, learning specialists, formative researchers, writers and producers, tends to result in superior quality ITV materials.

REFERENCES

1. G. R. Adkins, Roles in Televised Instruction, The Teachers College Journal, pp. 1-3, May 1960.

2. G. S. Lesser, Children and Television, Random House, New York, 1974.

3. J. Tunstall, The Open University Opens, University of Massachusetts Press, Amherst, 1974.

4. British Broadcasting Corporation, The BBC and the Open University, British Broadcasting Corporation, London, 1974.

5. E. L. Palmer, Formative Research in the Production of Television for Children, D. R. Olson (ed.) Media and Symbols, University of Chicago Press, Chicago, 1974.

6. J. Middleton, Cooperative School Television and Educational Change, Agency for Instructional Television, Bloomington, Indiana, 1979.

7. University of Mid-America, An Examination of Formative Evaluation in Course Development, University of Mid-America, Lincoln, Nebraska, mimeograph, 1976.

8. National University Consortium, The National University Consortium: Project Brief, University of Maryland, College Park, Maryland, mimeograph, 1981.

9. R. G. Sikes, Programs for Children: Public Television in the 1970's, Public Telecommunications Review, 8:5, pp. 7-25, September/October 1980.